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Did You Know?

- On an average weekday, the Big I accommodates 309,198 vehicles
- Approximately 12,300 Rio Rancho workers commute into Albuquerque, and 6,500 Albuquerque workers commute to Rio Rancho
- The intersection of Jefferson and Paseo del Norte has the highest traffic volume in the metropolitan area
- There are 1.3 jobs for each house in Albuquerque's Metropolitan area

Transit Oriented Development: TOD

The efficient and economical transportation option provided by the New Mexico Rail Runner Express brings with it a variety of opportunities for communities along the rail line. The Mid-Region Council of Governments is working with the Town of Bernalillo, the Village of Los Lunas, the City of Belen, and Bernalillo County in a grant funded effort to maximize the positive economic, land use, and transportation benefits of the new rail service.

The planning effort will emphasize what is called "Transit Oriented Development" or TOD to help capture the opportunities the rail stations present to each community. Each of the participating jurisdictions adopted resolutions supporting the MRCOG planning effort and expressing their respective interests in pursuing TOD.

TOD involves coordinating land use and transportation, and specifically the role of public transit, in the area in walking distance of a commuter or light rail system. Focusing on the area between ¼ and ½ mile, TOD emphasizes creating a walkable, pedestrian-friendly environment around transit connections that encourage residents to ride transit more and drive their cars less.

In addition to economic development opportunities and increasing transit ridership, the potential benefits of TOD range from include:

- Additional public space
- More transportation options
- Larger varieties of housing options

These are increasingly important issues as the region grows and ages.

While MRCOG's planning activities will advance the goals of each individual community, TOD generally incorporates mixed use (for example, mixing retail uses with residential) and includes a variety of housing options. Successful TOD efforts build on the existing identity of a community and offer housing options, public spaces, and commercial opportunities to local residents.

In the Town of Bernalillo, for example, TOD planning efforts will pursue pedestrian connections between the Rail Runner station and Camino del Pueblo, which is home to a number of existing businesses and is targeted for streetscape improvements. The addition of a pedestrian connection will make this area of town more accessible to Rail Runner passengers, visitors, tourists, and local residents.

A team of local and national experts is participating in MRCOG's TOD planning effort. The specifics will vary by community, but will always include a market analysis, a visioning and public involvement component, land use and transportation planning, and infrastructure evaluation. Potential products include station area plans, overlay zones, design guidelines, and the analysis of specific development opportunities.

Since implementation is the ultimate goal of the effort, the identification and expansion of funding opportunities will be emphasized throughout the process.

Information and comments will be solicited from community members throughout the process through public meetings, workshops, and presentations to local organizations.

In the Town of Bernalillo, the Transit Oriented Development planning efforts will pursue pedestrian connections between Camino del Pueblo and the Rail Runner station (shown at right).



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809 Copper Ave, NW
Albuquerque, NM 87102
www.mrcog-nm.gov
Phone: (505) 247-1750
Fax: (505) 247-1753

Officers of the Board of Directors

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**Executive Director
Lawrence Rael**

Did You Know?

- The most dangerous intersection for motorists in the metro area is Seven Bar Loop and Coors Boulevard.
- By 2030, New Mexico is projected to be the 5th "oldest" state, with 1 out of every 4 people over the age of 65

A Word from the Executive Director

As we look out over the next 20 years, residents of the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area will be faced with some very serious transportation challenges. Traffic congestion is expected to get worse in many areas of the community, the cost of owning and maintaining an automobile will likely grow more expensive relative to household income, and the portion of the population age 65 or older is expected to increase. All of these factors point to the need for a balanced transportation system. While roadway expansions and improvements are needed and necessary, we can no longer afford to invest all of our transportation resources into this singular mode. It is time to invest in other modes and transportation system enhancements. This includes, growing the public transit system, so that it can serve those that use it well. It also means building transit travel time advantages into the roadway system, so that public transit can be more competitive with auto travel times. Another component would be to expand transit service to communities that do not have access to this system. Still another factor involves funding transit at a level that will produce a system that can perform well now, and improve over time.

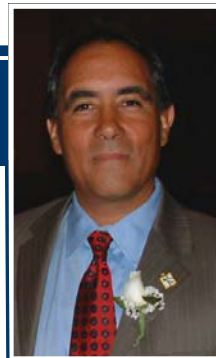
There are other types of transportation investments that also need careful consideration. This includes reversible, High Occupancy Transit (HOT) and High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes in corridors experiencing heavy congestion. We need to continue to invest in Intelligent Transportation Systems (variable message signs, cameras and detection) so travelers have real time information related to the performance of the transportation system. Finally, the bikeway system in the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area is well on its way to becoming a viable alternative for many trip markets. Work needs to continue on expanding the system, and providing better connections to the existing system.

Better connections and choices for the rural areas that surround Albuquerque are also necessary. These areas generate longer distance trips to the Albuquerque area, and serving these trip markets more effectively, through Park and Ride Bus Service or other higher capacity means provides significant benefits to both areas.

A diversified transportation system will help the region meet the accessibility and mobility needs of the citizenry, sustain and grow the local economy, and provide the quality of life people have come to expect in the Albuquerque area.



Lawrence Rael, MRCOG Executive Director



Lawrence Rael,
executive director

The Water Resources Board Moves Ahead

Since expanding its membership last year, the MRCOG Water Resources Board has been working to build a water planning partnership representing the Estancia Basin and Middle Rio Grande water planning regions. These two regions have much to gain by working together on water policy issues and common problems of diminishing water resources, water quality protection, and improving water infrastructure. The WRB serves as a multi-governmental forum to coordinate water programs and to help solve water management problems at both local and regional levels.

During the upcoming year, the WRB will concentrate on the implementation of the two regional water plans. Although distinctly different, these regional water plans have common objectives to improve the efficiencies of water use:

- Protect existing water resources
- Prepare for future water shortages

The potential for consolidation or collaboration of area-wide water systems is another priority within the water planning regions; and is already underway to some extent in Valencia and Tarrant Counties. The WRB intends to continue providing guidance and support for local water planning efforts to ensure continuity and cooperation in a region of shared resources.



The New Mexico Rail Runner Express

beep-beeping right along!

Rail Runner – Phase I

After a little more than two years of planning, design and construction, Rail Runner commuter train service between Albuquerque and Bernalillo started July 14th 2006. Work progressed on station construction and the track and signal work necessary to open service to Los Lunas in mid December and Belen in early February of this year. Both the Downtown Bernalillo station and the Bernalillo County/Int'l Sunport Station are anticipated to open for service this Spring.

Although the Rail Runner schedule is designed around commuters, and Saturday service is not a regular occurrence (yet), weekend service was provided to the Bernalillo Wine Festival and the International Balloon Fiesta, and special Christmas Shopping trains were run on select Saturdays in December.

During the first four months of operation, the Rail Runner carried 230,000 riders

with a 95 percent on-time performance rate. By the end of February of 2007, Rail Runner was celebrating its 300,000th rider. Not bad for a newbie!

New bus connections have been established through the cooperation of the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) Sandoval County, the City of Rio Rancho and the City of Albuquerque to link the Los Ranchos Journal Center station with the Journal Center, Cottonwood Mall, Intel, and Rio Rancho City Hall, and the U.S. 550 station with business in northern Rio Rancho, and the Sandoval County Judicial Complex and park and ride.

On April 1st, a zone-based fare structure was implemented for the whole 50-mile corridor so that fares are now based on distance traveled—visit our website at nmrailrunner.com for more information.

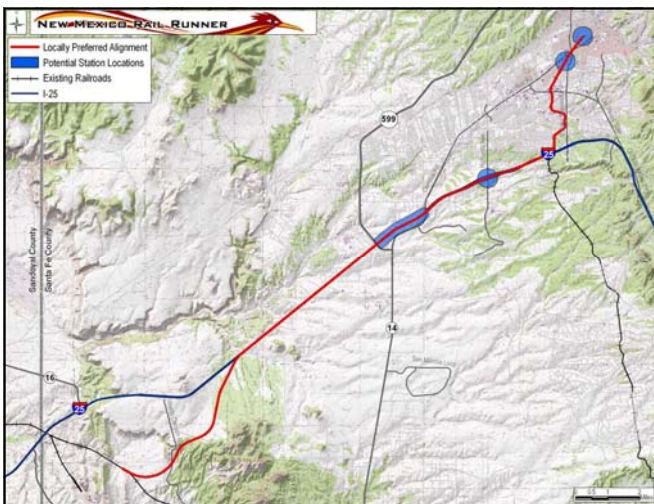
Rail Runner - Phase II

Work continues on extending the Rail Runner service to Santa Fe. The most recent efforts have focused on completing environmental and engineering studies on alternative alignments that would connect the existing railroad line near La Bajada hill and the Santa Fe Southern line in the vicinity of St. Francis Drive and I-25. The focus this fall was on two remaining



The Belen Station opening ceremony, which took place on February 2nd, drew crowds of people as well as Lieutenant Governor Diane Denish, Transportation Secretary Rhonda Fought, Belen Mayor Ronnie Torres, and others.

alternatives (see map to left). Public meetings have been held to discuss the characteristics of these two alignments and to seek public input and comment. In February of 2007 the Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization recommended that the New Mexico Department of Transportation select Alternative 1 (the alternative that utilizes the I-25 median) as the preferred route into Santa Fe. The NMDOT concurred with this recommendation. Work is now proceeding on additional design, planning and environmental work associated with this alternative. This work will focus on identifying precise locations for stations, evaluating service concepts (train schedules), connecting transit services and generating construction plans. Construction is anticipated to begin in early Fall 2007. Service is expected to start between Albuquerque and Santa Fe in December of 2008.



Mid-Region Transit District

Back in October, a transit "White Paper" discussion session was held with Mid-Region Transit District Board members. The White Paper session provided an opportunity for elected officials to discuss transit services in the four-county MRCOG area.

Some of the topics included:

- The relationship between transit service and economic development
- Previous findings from transit workshops

- Transit services in rural areas

In November, Sandoval County and the Mid-Region Transit District entered into an agreement whereby Sandoval County designated the MRTD as the exclusive agent of Sandoval County to administer and implement the County's brand new rural public transportation service called *Sandoval Easy Express* (SEE).

Service is scheduled to start this spring.



Looking to our Transportation Future

The 2030 Metropolitan Transportation Plan



Vehicular travel remains the region's most dominant mode of transportation, but other modes are getting more attention in this MTP than ever before.

After more than two years of work, the 2030 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) has been drafted. The MTP is the region's long-range transportation plan that addresses future mobility needs of the metropolitan area, including issues of congestion, air quality, safety, and quality of life. This long-range plan will help guide decisions about which transportation projects to implement in the short term.

"The MTP will ensure that all of the agencies in the region are working off the

same page", says Lawrence Rael, MRCOG's Executive Director. "It has become apparent that we're not a small town anymore. We now have some major congestion issues that bigger cities experience. That's why working with neighboring communities and developing regional plans is critical. It's about quality of life for the entire region."

Population and employment in the metro area is projected to increase by 40 percent in the next 25 years. MRCOG forecasts for the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area show that a great deal of the residential development will occur at the outer edges of the urbanized area, while much of the employment growth will continue to occur along I-25 and I-40 in areas closer to the urban core. The impact of these growth patterns is projected to increase commute times.

"There are many pieces to our transportation puzzle that weren't available even just a few years ago, like the Rail Runner, Rapid Ride, and improved bicycle routes", says Mayor Larry Abraham, Chairman

of the Metropolitan Transportation Board. "The MTB decides on the region's transportation priorities. We consider land use, economic development, environmental concerns, and other issues with regard to future development and how the transportation network can best serve the region".

Transportation projects represent a tremendous outlay of tax dollars. The 2030 MTP estimates that transportation projects in the region will cost about 5.7 billion dollars over the life of the Plan. How that money is spent both responds to present needs and influences future development.

After adoption by the Metropolitan Transportation Board (late April 2007), the Plan will be reviewed and (hopefully) approved by the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency. Soon after the 2030 MTP is adopted in its final form, MRCOG staff will begin research and analysis needed for the next long-range Plan.

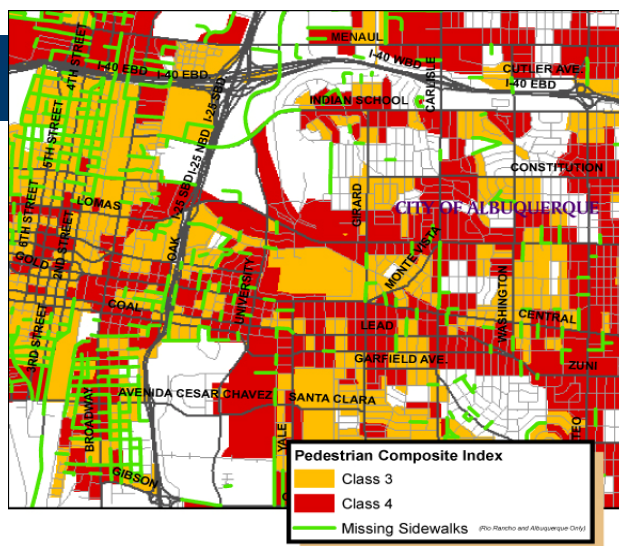
The Pedestrian Composite Index

The 2030 MTP addresses pedestrian mobility more than any previous plan. In addition to a number of pedestrian-specific projects, MRCOG staff have developed a state of the art tool to address pedestrian issues on a regional level.

Rodolfo Monge-Oviedo with MRCOG explains: "The challenge is to address pedestrian needs—typically local and site-specific—from a regional perspective." The Pedestrian Composite Index evaluates areas based on both their potential for attracting pedestrian traffic and the conditions which may deter it.

"Pedestrian activity is associated with schools, parks, accessibility to public transit and several other factors" says Monge-Oviedo. "Deterrents include pedestrian crash rates, crime, high vehicle speeds: the things that inhibit pedestrian use of the area."

Using MRCOG's Geographic Information System, Monge-Oviedo is able to map which areas have both high potential and high deterrents to pedestrian travel. "While the Index does not substitute for the ground-level analysis that local planners do, it shows at the regional level areas where pedestrian projects might be most usefully located."



In the above example, red and yellow areas indicate potential markets for pedestrian activity and a need for improvements to address deterrents to those activities. Green lines indicate that sidewalks are non-existent in those locations.





Finding the Right Match with the Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico

The Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico is working hard to bring together the business community and public education. In fact, the relationship between the two seems like “a natural fit”, says John Sapien, Chairman of WCCNM.

For example, the Public Service Company of New Mexico Resources indicated a need for welders. Workforce Connection was able to connect them to an apprenticeship program in Cuba, New Mexico, who then designed a direct feeder program for welders and other trades into PNM Resources. It sounds like a match made in heaven.

“Almost,” says Charles Cambron, Coordinator for Central/Northern New Mexico Youth Apprenticeship Council. “Providing learning opportunities for young men and women interested in pursuing a career in the trades industry is very difficult without the support of the New Mexico Business Community.” Cambron adds “PNM Resources has really stepped up to the plate, and is currently looking to hire some of the graduates out of the Cuba High School welder program.” John Myers, Vice President, Power Production for PNM Resources added, “We all recognize that filling these good-paying jobs is not just positive for PNM Resources – it’s good for New Mexico.”

Like PNM, local employers and Job Corps are entering into collaborative agreements with WCCNM. This set-up allows Job Corp programs to act as direct feeders into some of New Mexico’s most difficult-to-fill positions. “We should have been working together like this for years” says Stanley Bessey, Executive Director for New Mexico Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association.

Filling a Need With our Youth

Connecting Central New Mexico Community College (CNM) and Youth Development Incorporated (YDI) has been a long-standing goal of WCCNM. Today, this partnership is much closer to being realized.

“Through the New Mexico Workforce Investment Act, the Education, Training, and Employment Division operates five sites that provide comprehensive youth services centered at one location that are all focused on helping clients improve their employability and quality of life” says Virginia Trujillo, YDI Vice President for Education, Training, and Workforce Development.

Currently, YDI has youth ages 15-24 that receive internal training in construction YDI certificates. CNM Applied Technologies is in the process of partnering with YDI on credit dual enrollment and CNM Higher Education Board associate degree or certificates.

WCCNM Brings Community Together as Locals Face Layoffs

In addition to filling job needs from a proactive standpoint, Workforce Connection has proven that it also has the ability to “react” to a serious employment crisis.

Take for instance the layoffs following Tewa Moulding’s announcement late last

year that their local plant was shutting its doors, leaving 73 displaced workers.

The Central Workforce Board and the Governor’s Office of Workforce Training and Development brought key members of the community together to host a job fair of major proportions “This is exactly what this board is designed to do – respond to workforce issues so that New Mexicans have options for re-employment in the event of a lay-off”, said New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson.

Job Fair community partners included:

- New Mexico Department of Labor
- Albuquerque Economic Development
- Bernalillo County Parks and Recreation
- City of Albuquerque Economic Development
- Rio Rancho Economic Development Corporation
- Albuquerque Hispano Chamber of Commerce
- Governor’s Office for Workforce Training and Development





Mid-Region Council of Governments
809 Copper Avenue, NW
Albuquerque, NM 87102

United We Ride—New Mexico

The MRCOG district is the pilot area for *United We Ride – New Mexico*. This project will formulate recommendations for a statewide coordination of community transportation services. “Community transportation services” encompass both publicly-provided specialized transit services, such as paratransit, as well as human service agency transportation, such as that provided for the Medicaid program.

The project consultant, Nelson\Nygaard, has completed the benchmarking component of the work effort. This information provides a good snapshot of ridership and funding levels during fiscal year 2004. A minimum of 1,151,000 rides were provided at a cost of at least \$19 million. Fifty percent of the trips were provided by state agencies; 32 percent by County/City/and Local agencies; and 18 percent by Medicaid non-emergency medical transportation providers. It's interesting to note that the human service agencies are the ones spending the lion's share of the money for community transportation services. The percentage breakdown of transportation expenditures were as follows:

- Medicaid non-emergency medical transportation providers: 42%
- County/City/Local agencies: 34%
- Other state agencies: 23%



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